

Members of the Education Committee,

I have been working with children and adolescents with autism and other developmental disabilities for over 15 years. I have dedicated much of that time educating children in public schools, and I've been responsible for training educators in the public domain. Currently, my practice largely consists of performing Independent Educational Evaluations of student's programs to determine the appropriateness of the program in meeting a child's educational needs. It is from this experience that I respectfully urge you to support Section 2 of HB 5425.

At this time, public schools are desperately trying to educate children with autism and related disabilities using the teaching methodology of applied behavior analysis- a model with a large body of empirical research proving its effectiveness. But, schools are largely failing in the execution simply because they do not have the right personnel overseeing the implementation of services. I see school districts time and time again attempt to provide appropriate services for a child only to have it fall apart due to poor supervision. Schools are wasting funding money on unqualified professionals to oversee programming. Like any other service provided in school (occupational therapy, speech-language therapy) ABA services require the oversight from qualified professionals and schools should be able to rely on a license or certificate to know who is qualified. Let's stop wasting the tax payers dollars and recognize the credentials necessary to appropriately educate our children with special needs!

Finally, I ask you to carefully consider the dangerous implications of Section 3 of HB 5425. Placing the burden of proof of the "moving party" is placing children with special needs educations at severe risk. I lived and worked in New Jersey when this change was made and it forced children to fail in a school setting before a case could be made for service changes. It caused unnecessary stress on families already in crisis and lost valuable time in a child's life. New Jersey, like other states, reversed this decision after recognizing a complete failure of the legal system to protect children's rights to a free and appropriate education. Let's not make the same mistake in Connecticut. It is our ethical responsibility to protect children who often do not have a voice of their own.

Respectfully submitted,
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